THE UNIQUE ROLE OF RELIGION IN MIDDLE EASTERN ETHNIC CONFLICT: A LARGE-N STUDY

There has always been a common perception that religion and politics are particularly and uniquely intertwined in Middle Eastern culture. While the anecdotal evidence for this perception is overwhelming, there have been few cross-sectional, large-n studies which have attempted to confirm this perception and explain why this close connection between religion and politics in the Middle East exists. Accordingly, this study uses the Minorities at Risk dataset to test this perception with regard to ethnic conflicts by comparing ethnic conflicts in the Middle East to those occurring in the rest of the world. The results show that on all measures used here, religion is at least twice as powerful an influence on Middle Eastern ethnic conflicts as it is on such conflicts in the rest of the world. However, other than this, Middle Eastern ethnic conflicts are not distinguishable from ethnic conflicts occurring elsewhere. These results hold up even when controlling for the region's Islamic and autocratic nature.

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Religion and politics have always been intimately and uniquely intertwined in Middle Eastern culture. In modern times this remains the case. The Arab-Israeli conflict has had religious elements both in its international and domestic manifestations. The Israeli government since the establishment of the state has always had a religious party in the government. Influential Islamic opposition movements and/or political parties exist in most Arab states. In addition, 17 Middle Eastern states have an official state religion and the other five strongly support Islam. However, to date, few large-n (quantitative) cross-sectional studies comparing the impact of religion on Middle Eastern ethnic conflicts to those occurring in the rest of the world have been carried out.[1] Accordingly, this study uses data from the Minorities at Risk dataset as well as data collected independently to ask the question of whether religion plays a unique role in Middle Eastern ethnic conflicts. It is important to note that for the purposes of this study, the Middle East includes the Arab states of what is commonly referred to as the Middle East, Israel, Turkey, Iran, and the Arab states of North Africa.

Religion, Violence, and the Middle East

The association between religion and violence in general is well documented. For example, Juergensmeyer (1991) argues that violent concepts like martyrdom, sacrifice, and the "rhetoric of war" are integral to religion. Girard (1977) takes this one step further when he argues that religion exists to limit violence by regulating its expression in an organized format. Similarly, Rapoport (1991a: 118-123, 1991b: 446) and Fox (1999) argue that while religion can often inspire nonviolence, all major religions have the potential to inspire violence. This is because religion has the ability to inspire intense commitment and emotions that make it difficult to reconcile religious conflicts, thus inviting violent solutions. In fact, "Before the 19th century, religion provided the only acceptable justification for terror" (Rapoport, 1984: 659) Haynes (1994: 93), Kramer (1991: 549), and Piscatori (1994: 361) make similar arguments with regard to Islam. Hoffman (1995) and Rapoport (1990) make similar arguments with regard to religious terrorists.

As much as religion is associated with violence in general, the two are even more closely associated in the Middle East. That all of the Middle East's major religions, Islam, Christianity, and Judaism, have concepts of holy war illustrates this point.[2] The subject of religion and politics in the Middle East has been the focus of several studies which deal with the impact of religious radicalism. For example, Sandler (1997) argues that Jewish religious radicalism has significantly influenced Israeli politics from the inception of the state.[3] While this influence has varied over time from support of the government to opposition to the government, perhaps reaching its most extreme in the 1995 assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, it has always been present. Similarly, Amara (1997), Landau (1993), and Smooha (1984) argue that Islam has had a significant impact on Arab integration into Israeli political life.

[1] An earlier and simplified version of this study, Fox (2001a), did address this issue.
[2] For a comparison of Christian and Islamic concepts of just war see Kennedy (1999).
[3] For further reading see: Liebman and Don-Yehiya (1983), Liebman (1989) and Cohen (1995).

That Islam, the predominant religion in the Middle East, from its inception, has always been a political religion is an important indicator of the close connection between religion, violence and politics in the Middle East. There is no separation in Islam between religion and politics (Haynes, 1994:5, Kramer, 1991: 549, and Gellner, 1992: 9). Thus, the fact that religion is so important in an overwhelmingly Islamic region should not be surprising.[4]

There are several other reasons to link Islam and violence in the Middle East. First, many argue that the failure of Middle Eastern secular governments to successfully reach the goals of economic self-sufficiency and social justice has undermined the legitimacy of these regimes. This has resulted in the resurgence of Islam as a legitimate alternative to these regimes' more secular ideologies. (Esposito, 1983; Azar and Moon, 1987; Deeb, 1992: 53-4; Piscatori, 1994: 361-363; Layachi and Haireche, 1992: 70) However, it is important to note that many believe that this trend is common to the entire Third World and is not unique to Islam or the Middle East. (Haynes, 1994; Juergensmeyer, 1993)

Second, Huntington's (1993; 1996) "Clash of Civilizations" argument emphasizes the clash of cultures between the West and Islam as one of the major post-Cold War trends. That is, the end of the Cold War has increased the importance of culture, which Huntington largely defines by religion, in both international and domestic conflicts and this is especially true for Islamic vs. Western clashes. However, many strongly disagree with Huntington's arguments regarding Islam.[5]

Yet, Huntington's arguments are consistent with the argument that Islam and democracy are incompatible.[6] Many militant Islamists reject democracy outright as a Western-Christian abomination which conflicts with Islamic law and can only weaken and corrupt Muslim society. (Zaki, 1994: 112). The following statement provides a good example of this mindset:

> We believe that the three principles[7] [on which modern Western life is based] are wrong and corrupt [fasidah]. In fact, we believe very strongly ...that these are the source of the evils, disasters and tragedies that have befallen humanity, and we have taken it upon ourselves to fight and destroy them, until we uproot them, with all the means and methods we possess (Al-Mawdudi cited by Abed, 1995: 121).

It is important to note that according to many, Islam and democracy are not necessarily incompatible. There are many diverse interpretations of Islam, as there are of most religions, and many of these interpretations are compatible with democracy. Islamic principles like consultation, consensus, the equality of all men, the rule of law, and independent reasoning can be, some say, a basis for Islamic democracy. (Esposito and Piscatori, 1991; Esposito and Voll, 2001; Feldman, 2003;

[4] For further readings on religion and the Middle East, see Borthwick (1980), Don-Yehiya (1987), Heilman and Friedman (1991), Liebman and Don-Yehiya (1984), Owen (1992), and Rubin (1990).

5 For a discussion of Huntington's theories with regard to Islam and his critics see Fox (2001b; 2004)

6 Midlarsky (1998) in a quantitative study found a correlation between Islam and authoritarianism.

[7] That is, secularism, nation-state and democracy.

Fuller, 2002) On a more practical level, while there are no democracies within the Arab world, about half of all Muslims live in democratic and near-democratic states. (Stephan, 2000) Islamic parties have successfully and peacefully used democratic systems to their benefit and even pushed for democratic reforms. (Espositio and Piscatori, 2001) Furthermore, many argue that Islamic Middle Eastern regimes cannot isolate themselves from the democratization global trends. (Rothstein, 1995; Esposito and Piscatori, 1991, and Hudson, 1991) Nevertheless, this vision of Islamic democracy does not include separation of religion and state and does not fully include non-Muslims. (Feldman, 2003)

Third, many link Islam, or at least some interpretations of it, directly to violence. For example, Kramer (1991) argues that the Hizbullah movement in Lebanon used Islam to justify violence. They believe that their submission to Islamic law frees them of other moral constraints. This means that Hizbullah members have no need to justify their acts, no matter how violent, by other codes. However, Kramer does note that Hizbullah's Islamic thinkers do, at least in theory, place some limitations on what types of violence are permissible. Rapoport (1990) provides a similar description of the behavior of the Al-Jihad movement in Egypt. Also, Rapoport (1984: 664-668) describes the ancient Islamic Assassin movement as an Islamic movement that used terror and assassination as its primary tools to purify Islam. In fact, they refrained from other methods of persuasion on ideological grounds.

On a more general level, the scholarship on fundamentalism also shows an intimate connection between religion and violence. This is important to our purposes because of the common perception that Islamic fundamentalism is a growing factor in Middle Eastern and world politics.[8] Marty and Appleby (1991; 1993; 1994) in their groundbreaking study of fundamentalism argue that it is a reaction against modernity and that fundamentalist violence, no matter how aggressive it may appear, is defensive. Fundamentalists defend the beliefs and the culture they hold dear from all threats internal or external. Wentz (1987) calls this phenomenon the "walls of religion." A psychological wall is erected by individuals and communities to protect their beliefs and is defended at all costs.[9] This defense is so intense that it often obliterates the public/private distinction within the community being defended. (Garvey, 1991)

It is important to note, however, that many argue that fundamentalism is not the most prevalent form of Islam. For example Weigel (1992: 185-187) argues that

8 For an example of such arguments, see Huntington (1993 and 1996).

9 Rapoport (1991b) makes a similar argument in general, as does Sprinzak (1991) with regard to Jewish fundamentalists in Israel.

> Islamic fundamentalism is not the predominant form of Muslim belief in the modern world... [but] one must confront the countervailing evidence that militant forms of Islam play an extraordinarily important role in regional and world politics.

In fact, the historic experience of Islam shows that it has the capacity to "religiously legitimate societies of considerable tolerance." Similarly, Haynes (1994: 67-70) Hunter (1998) and Pfaff (1997) argue that Islam is not monolithic and that Islamic fundamentalism is controversial within the Islamic civilization. Furthermore, many like Marty and Appleby (1991; 1993; 1994) argue that the rise in fundamentalism is a worldwide phenomenon not unique to Islam. Be that as it may, few would argue that there is no such thing as fundamentalist Islam and that it has no impact on politics in the Middle East and elsewhere.

Finally, several empirical studies, including Ebaugh and Haney (1978), Harris and Mills (1985), Jelen (1984), Nielson and Fultz (1995), Scheepers (1998), and Woodrum (1988) link religiosity to political opinions and behavior.

Religion and Ethnicity

Religion is an important element in ethnicity. For example, Gurr (1993a: 3) argues that

> ...in essence, communal [ethnic] groups are psychological communities: groups whose core members share a distinctive and enduring collective identity based on cultural traits and lifeways that matter to them and to others with whom they interact.
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> People have many possible bases for communal identity: shared historical experiences or myths, *religious beliefs*, language, ethnicity, region of residence, and, in castelike systems, customary occupations. Communal groups--which are also referred to as ethnic groups, minorities and peoples--usually are distinguished by several reenforcing traits. The key to identifying communal groups is not the presence of a particular trait or combination of traits, but rather the shared perception that the defining traits, whatever they are, set the group apart.

That is, religion is important to ethnic identities, and consequently ethnic conflicts, when the parties involved consider it to be important.[10] Fox (2004) quantitatively confirms these findings showing that while religion is an important factor only in a minority of ethnic conflicts, when it is a factor, religion significantly influences these conflicts. Rummel (1997) and Reynal-Querol (2002) also find a positive correlation between religion and intrastate violence.

[10] Horowitz (1985) and Carment and James (1997) make similar arguments.

Research Design

The purpose of this study is to assess the general differences between ethnoreligious conflict in the Middle East and the rest of the world. Accordingly, the primary method used here is means-tests which are sufficient to show the differences between regions, if any, in average levels of conflict. Some correlations are also used in order to assess covariance.

The variables used here come from two sources. The ethnic conflict variables are taken from T.R. Gurr's Minorities at Risk Phase 3 dataset (MAR3). The unit of analysis is the ethnic minority. There are 268 minorities coded in the MAR3 dataset of which 105 are ethno-religious minorities.[11] For operational purposes a minority is an ethno-religious minority when at least 80% of that group's members are of different religious denominations than that of the dominant ethnic group.[12] Also, these groups are only included if there is a viable government that is in control of the state in question. This is because the data is designed to analyze the relationship between ethnic minorities and the state. For this reason, cases like the civil wars in Bosnia and Afghanistan are not included. Additional religion data on these 105 groups was coded for the larger study of which this work is part.[13] For the purposes of this study, the Middle East includes the Arab states of what is commonly known as the Middle East, the Arab states of north Africa, Israel and Turkey.

The variables used here were selected on the basis of which variables were determined by Gurr (1993a and 1993b) and Gurr and Moore (1997), in their analyses of the various forms of the Minorities at Risk dataset, to be the most influential in determining the level of ethnic conflict. Gurr posits that discrimination against an ethnic minority causes that minority to form grievances. These grievances lead to actual protest and/or rebellion. Gurr (1993b) tests this theory with regard to economic, political, and cultural discrimination and grievances, as well as grievances over autonomy. Accordingly, these variables are examined here. However, Gurr does not include religion as an aspect of his study. In order to remedy this, additional variables on religion were collected for this study. These include religious discrimination and grievances which mirror Gurr's grievance and discrimination variables. In addition to religious grievances, which measure complaints about religious discrimination, a religious demands variable is included to measure more active demands for religious rights. Variables measuring the religious legitimacy and the relevance of religion to the conflict are also included.

Most of the variables are judgmental ordinal variables or composite variables created from several judgmental ordinal variables. That is, the variables were assigned values by a coder using

11 There are currently 285 groups coded in the MAR3 dataset. The last 17 groups were added since the religion data was coded and were therefore excluded from this analysis.

12 Protestant and Catholic Christianity are considered separate religions for the purposes of this study. However, Orthodox Christianity is not considered sufficiently different from either Protestantism or Catholicism for such conflicts to be included. The Sunni and Shi'i branches of Islam are considered separate religions for the purpose of this study.

13 Unless otherwise noted, all tests performed here are only on these 105 groups.

an ordinal scale based on specified criteria.

Religion Variables

These variables are not part of the MAR3 dataset and were coded specifically for the larger study of which this work is part. Unless otherwise noted these variables cover the 1994-1995 period.
Religious Discrimination: Religious discrimination is defined here as the extent to which religious practices are restricted either due to public policy or widespread social practice It is a composite indicator, ranging from 0 to 8, of the scope of discrimination which combines several coded variables.[14]
Religious Grievances: Religious grievances are defined as grievances publicly expressed by group leaders over what they perceive as religious discrimination against them. This variable, ranging from 0 to 24, is a composite variable measuring the grievances expressed by minority groups over religious issues.[15]
Religious Demands: Religious demands are defined here as the demand for religious rights and/or privileges. This variable, ranging from 0 to 5, differs from religious grievances, which are complaints against religious discrimination. Thus, religious grievances are reactive, whereas religious demands are active demands for more rights and privileges.[16]

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14 Each of the following specific types of religious discrimination were coded on a scale of 0 to 2 (2 = the activity is prohibited or sharply restricted for most or all group members; 1 = the activity is slightly restricted for most or all group members or sharply restricted for some of them; 0 = not significantly restricted for any.) The coded values for the eight variables were added and the sum was divided by two to create a set of indicators (one for each biennium) with values that range from 0 to 16. The activities so coded are:
- Restrictions on public observance of religious services, festivals and/or holidays.
- Restrictions on building, repairing and/or maintaining places of worship.
- Forced observance of religious laws of other group.
- Restrictions on formal religious organizations.
- Restrictions on the running of religious schools and/or religious education in general.
- Restrictions on the observance of religious laws concerning personal status, including marriage and divorce.
- Restrictions on the ordination of and/or access to clergy.
- Restrictions on other types of observance of religious law.

15 This variable measures grievances publicly expressed by group leaders over discrimination in the same categories as from which the second variable from which the composite religious discrimination variable is constructed in addition to a category for diffuse grievances that is only coded when no other specific category is coded. The level each type of grievance is coded on the following scale, the totals of which are added to form a scale of 0 to 24:
3 = issue important for most of the group.
2 = issue is significant but its relative importance cannot be judged.
1 = issue is of lesser importance, or of major concern to only one faction of the group.
0 = issue is not judged to be of any significant importance.

16 This variable was coded on the following scale:
0. None.
1. The group is demanding more religious rights.
2. The group is seeking a privileged status for their religion which offends the religious convictions of the dominant group.
3. The group is seeking to impose some aspects of its religious ideology on the dominant group.
4. The group is seeking a form of ideological hegemony for its framework which will affect some of the dominant group.

Religious Legitimacy: Religious legitimacy is defined here as the extent to which it is legitimate to invoke religion in political discourse. The variable, ranging from 0 to 4, is a composite indicator based upon codings for four factors. The presence of each of these factors is posited to indicate indirectly that it is legitimate to invoke religion in political discourse.[17]
Relevance of religion: This variable (RRELVNT), ranging from 0 to 5, was assigned a value based on the strength of religious discrimination and grievances compared to discrimination and grievances over political, economic, cultural, and autonomy issues.[18] It was coded for the entire 1990 to 1995 period.

Ethnic Conflict Variables

Unless otherwise noted, these variables are taken directly from the MAR3 dataset and cover the 1994-1995 period. For more details on the MAR3 dataset see Gurr (1993a & 1993b) and Gurr and Moore (1997) as well as the Minorities at Risk webpage at www.cidcm.umd.edu/inscr/mar.
Economic discrimination: This variable, ranging from 0 to 9, is a composite variable measuring the level of economic discrimination against a minority. It is based on the level of the minority group's poverty compared to other groups and whether the government's policies are intended to improve the minority's economic status or are discriminatory.
Economic Grievances: This variable, ranging from 0 to 15, is a composite variable measuring the level of grievances expressed by the minority over the following issues: diffuse economic grievances, explicit objectives not clear (coded only if more specific categories could not be coded); greater share of public funds and/or services; greater economic opportunities (such as education and access to higher status occupations); improved working conditions, better wages, and/or protective regulations (if sought specifically for group members); protection of land, jobs, and/or resources being used for the advantage of other groups; or other more specific economic grievances that do not fit one of the above categories.[19]
Political discrimination: This variable, ranging from 0 to 9, is a composite variable measuring

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5. The group is seeking a form of ideological hegemony for its framework which will affect most or all of the dominant group.

17 Each of the following factors are coded as 1 if found to be present and RLEG is the total of these 4 factors:
- A history of religious involvement in politics and/or conflict.
- Religious leaders are actively using religious rhetoric to mobilize the population.
- Religion is offered as the solution to non-religious economic, political and/or social problems.
- The presence of an official religion in the state's constitution, laws, or de-facto public policy.

18 The variable was coded on the following scale:
0. None.
1. Marginal relevance. Issues are basically of a non-religious nature but religion is being used to legitimize those issues and/or mobilize the group.
2. Religious issues are significant but are less important than other non-religious issues.
3. Religion is one of several significant issues which are of roughly equal importance.
4. Religion is the primary issue of the conflict but there are other significant issues involved.
5. Religion is the only issue relevant to the conflict.

19 Each of these categories was coded on the following scale and the total is summed: 3 = issue important for most of the group; 2 = issue is significant but its relative importance cannot be judged; 1 = issue is of lesser importance, or of major concern to only one faction of the group; 0 = issue is not judged to be of any significant importance.

the level of political discrimination against a minority. It is based on two factors. First, the presence and strength of political restrictions on: freedom of expression; free movement; place of residence; rights in judicial proceedings; political organization; restrictions on voting; recruitment to the police and/or military; access to the civil service; and attainment of high office. Second, whether the government's policies are intended to improve the minority's political status or are discriminatory.

Political Grievances: This variable, ranging from 0 to 15, is a composite measure measuring the level of grievances expressed by the minority group the following issues: diffuse political grievances, explicit objectives not clear (coded only if more specific categories, could not be coded); the desire for greater political rights in the group's own community or region; greater participation for the group in politics and decision-making at the central state level; equal civil rights and status; change in unpopular local officials or policies; and other specific grievances that do not fit one of the above categories.[20]

Cultural Discrimination: This variable, ranging from 0 to 10.5, is a composite variable measuring the level of cultural discrimination against a minority. It is based on the presence and strength of restrictions on: the observance of the group's religion; speaking and publishing in the group's language or dialect; instruction in the group's language; the celebration of group holidays, ceremonies, and cultural events; dress, appearance, and/or behavior; on marriage and/or family life; and organizations that promote the group's cultural interests.

Cultural grievances: This variable, ranging from 0 to 15, is a composite variable measuring the grievances expressed by the minority group over non-religious cultural issues. It is based on the strength of grievances expressed over the following issues: general cultural grievances (coded only if other more specific variables could not be coded); religion,[21] group culture and lifeways; language issues; protection from threats and attacks by other communal groups; and other specific grievances that do not fit one of the above categories.[22]

Grievances over autonomy: This variable, ranging from 0 to 12, is a composite variable measuring the grievances expressed by the minority group over autonomy and self-determination issues. It is based on the strength of grievances expressed over the following issues: general autonomy grievances (coded only if other more specific categories could not be coded); union with kindred groups elsewhere; political independence; regional autonomy with widespread powers; and regional autonomy with limited powers.[23]

Protest and rebellion: Protest is coded on a Guttman scale of 0 to 6[24] and rebellion is coded on a

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20 Each of these categories was scored on the same scale as economic grievances and summed.

21 Because this variable includes religious grievances, there is some covariance with the religious grievances variable. However, it is only one of many components of the variable and it is, accordingly, still useful. The correlation between religious and cultural grievances for the 1992-1993 period are .198 with a significance of .045.

22 Each of these categories was scored on the same scale as economic grievances and summed.

23 Each of these categories was scored on the same scale as economic grievances and summed.

24 0. none reported

1. verbal opposition (public letters, petitions, posters, publications, agitation, etc.). Code requests by a minority-controlled regional group for independence here.

2. scattered acts of symbolic resistance (e.g. sit-ins, blockage of traffic), sabotage, symbolic destruction of property

3. political organizing activity on a substantial scale. (Code mobilization for autonomy and/or secession by a minority-controlled regional government here.

Guttman scale of 0 to 7.[25] These variables are coded for 1993 only.
Democracy: This variable is included in the Minorities at Risk dataset and is taken from the 1994 version of the Polity III dataset. They measure the level of a state's institutional democracy in 1994 on a scale of 0 to 10 based on the following factors: competitiveness of political participation; competitiveness of executive recruitment; openness of executive recruitment; and constraints on the chief executive.[26]

Data Analysis and Discussion

Before beginning the analysis of the differences in ethnoreligious conflict between regions, it is appropriate to assess the nature of the groups in those regions. That is, how many of the ethnic minorities in any given region are also religious minorities. About 39% (105 out of 268) of ethnic minorities worldwide are also religious minorities; nearly 54% (14 out of 26) of Middle Eastern ethnic minorities are also religiously distinct. Only Asia has a higher percentage, by about half a percent, of ethnoreligious minorities (31 out of 57). Thus, the Middle East has a disproportionally high percentage of ethnoreligious minorities, but it is not unique in this.

The first step in determining whether Middle Eastern ethnoreligious minorities are different from those in the rest of the world is to compare the mean levels of several conflict variables in the Middle East and the rest of the world. The rest of the world is divided into three categoris: conflicts involving Muslim minorities; conflicts with non-Islamic minorities and Muslim minorities; and all other conflicts. This is to assess if any differences between the Middle East and the rest of the world are due to the Middle East being prominently Islamic.

There are two categories of variables so tested, religious conflict variables and general ethnic conflict variables. The results, presented in Table 1, show that the Middle East scores the highest

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4. a few demonstrations, rallies, strikes, and/or riots, total participation less than 10,000
5. demonstrations, rallies, strikes, and/or riots, total participation estimated between 10,000 and 100,000
6. demonstrations, rallies, strikes, and/or riots, total participation over 100,000

25 0. None.
1. Political banditry, sporadic terrorism.
2. Campaigns of terrorism.
3. Local rebellions: armed attempts to seize power in a locale. If they prove to be the opening round in what becomes a protracted guerrilla or civil war during the year being coded, code the latter rather than local rebellion. Code declarations of independence by a minority-controlled regional government here.
4. Small-scale guerrilla activity.[small-scale guerrilla activity has all these three traits: fewer than 1000 armed fighters; sporadic armed attacks (less than 6 reported per year); and attacks in a small part of the area occupied by the group, or in one or two other locales).]
5. Intermediate-scale guerrilla activity. [intermediate-scale guerrilla activity has one or two of the defining traits of large-scale activity and one or two of the defining traits of small-scale activity.]
6. Large-scale guerrilla activity. [large-scale guerrilla activity has all these traits: more than 1000 armed fighters; frequent armed attacks (more than 6 reported per year); and attacks affecting large part of the area occupied by group.]
7. Protracted civil war, fought by rebel military with base areas.

26 For more details see Jaggers and Gurr (1995: 472).

on all of the religion variables with a high level of significance. All of the religion variables in the Middle East are higher than in any other category. Furthermore this is statistically significant for all of the variables when comparing them to the rest of the world as a whole. These differences are also statistically significant between the Middle East and 3 of the 5 variables for Muslim minorities, 3 of the 5 variables for Muslim majorities and 2 of 5 variables for when neither group is Muslim. Thus, religion is clearly more important in Middle Eastern ethnoreligious conflicts than elsewhere.

1. TABLO BURAYA KONACAK

Table 1: Means of Variables for Minority Groups by Region

Variables	Means					
	All Groups	Middle East	Rest of World			
			All Groups	Islamic Minorities	Non-Islamic Minorities in Islamic States	Non-Islamic Minorities in Non-Islamic States
Religious Discrimination	0.64	1.57	0.50a	0.57a	0.60a	0.36a
Religious Grievances	2.37	4.21	2.09a	2.19	2.88	1.43bg
Religious Demands	0.30	1.21	0.15a	0.13a	0.24b	0.11a
Religious Legitimacy	1.44	2.86	1.22c	1.61c	1.56c	0.63cfh
Relevance of religion	1.32	2.50	1.14b	1.42a	1.52a	0.63cfh
Economic Discrimination	1.70	1.93	1.67	1.61	1.12	2.11g
Economic Grievances	2.57	2.31	2.60	2.48	2.16	3.03
Political Discrimination	2.10	2.71	2.01	1.68	2.48d	1.97
Political Grievances	3.11	2.85	3.14	3.10	3.08	3.23
Autonomy Grievances	2.10	2.00	2.11	2.74	1.42e	2.26g
Cultural Discrimination	1.24	1.75	1.16	1.18	1.12	0.96
Cultural Grievances	3.18	1.62	3.41a	3.26a	3.71b	3.34b
Democracy	4.70	2.00	5.12b	5.45b	2.80e	6.49ch
Protest	1.58	1.54	1.59	2.03	1.42	1.32d
Rebellion	0.90	0.58	0.94	1.07	1.08	0.74
Total Cases	105	14	91	14	25	35

a = Significance (t-test) between this value and the value for Middle East < .05
b = Significance (t-test) between this value and the value for Middle East < .01
c = Significance (t-test) between this value and the value for Middle East < .001
d = Significance (t-test) between this value and the value for Islamic Minorities < .05
e = Significance (t-test) between this value and the value for Islamic Minorities < .01
f = Significance (t-test) between this value and the value for Islamic Minorities < .001
g = Significance (t-test) between this value and the value for Islamic States < .05
h = Significance (t-test) between this value and the value for Islamic States < .001

Also, when comparing conflicts involving Muslims with those that do not in the non-Middle East, religion is clearly more important in conflicts involving Muslims. The mean levels of the religion variables are about the same between the two categories of conflicts outside the Middle East involving Muslims and there are no statistically significant differences between the two categories. However for all five variables, the means are higher for non-Middle Eastern conflicts involving Muslims than they are for conflicts that do not involve Muslims with these differences being statistically significant for two variables with regard to Muslim minorities and three variables with regard to Muslim majorities.

Thus we have a clear hierarchy of where religion is important. Religion is most important in Middle Eastern ethnoreligious conflicts. It is second-most-important in conflicts in Islamic states from outside of the Middle East. It is least important in conflicts outside of the Middle East in non-Islamic states.

The non-religious indicators of ethnic conflict, also shown in Table 1, paint a different picture. In general, there is no clear pattern of Middle Eastern ethnoreligious conflicts having particularly high or particularly low scores on the nonreligious ethnic conflict indicators. Nor are there any clear differences between the categories into which the non-Middle East is divided. However, there are two exceptions to this. First, Middle Eastern states are clearly more autocratic than non-Middle Eastern States and among non-Middle Eastern states the Islamic ones are more autocratic than the non-Islamic ones. Second, grievances expressed over cultural discrimination are lower in the Middle East than elsewhere, though the levels of cultural discrimination that cause these grievances are at similar levels in the Middle East and elsewhere.

Thus, overall, while religion is particularly important in Middle Eastern ethnoreligious conflicts, these conflicts are not otherwise particularly distinguishable from conflicts going on in the rest of the world. There are two potential explanations for this particular importance of religion in the Middle East. The first is autocracy. The results here show that the Middle East is the most autocratic region of the world. The results of this study are consistent with similar quantitative findings by Jaggers and Gurr (1995: 477-478)[27] and Midlarsky (1998) and the qualitative findings of Assefa (1990: 256-257), Lewis (1993a: 96-98) and Piscatori (1994: 365-366). This is important because many link regime type to the nature of conflict. For example, Fox (1998: 58-59), Gurr (1988: 55, 1993a: 85, 137; 1996: 69), and Gurr and Moore (1997: 1082) all argue that protest is more likely under democratic regimes while rebellion is more likely under autocratic ones. Hegre et. al. (1998), Ellingsen (1996), and Ellingsen & Gledisch (1997) argue that the instability of semi-democracies make conflict in general more likely under such regimes. Also, many explain the fact that no two democracies have ever fought a war with each other as being due to the nature of democratic regimes.[28] Given all of this, it is logical to argue that there may

27 This is not surprising because the data on autocracy and democracy used here comes originally from the same version of the Polity III dataset used by Gurr and Jaggers for their analysis.

28 For discussions of the role of internal political structures in international conflict and the Democratic Peace propositions, at the national level of analysis see: Rummel (1983), Chan (1984), Weede (1984). At the systemic

be some connection between autocracy and the importance of religion in ethnic conflicts.[29]

In order to assess the impact of autocracy on religion in Middle Eastern ethnoreligious conflict, the correlations between both the democracy/autocracy variables and the religion variables are tested in Table 2. The results show that some, but not all, of the religion variables are significantly correlated with autocracy and democracy. Religious discrimination, and the relevance of religion to the conflict are significantly and negatively correlated with state democracy.

2. TABLO BURAYA KONACAK

Table 2: Correlations between Religion Variables and Autocracy/Democracy

Religion Variables	Democracy
Religious Discrimination	-.318b
Religious Grievances	-.163
Religious Demands	.085
Religious Legitimacy	-.126
Relevance of Religion	-.221a

a = Significance (p-value) < .05
b = Significance (p-value) < .001

This means that the level of autocracy or democracy in Middle Eastern states partially but not wholly explains the disproportional importance of religion in the regions' ethnoreligious conflicts. While some of the religion variables, all of which reach their highest mean levels in the Middle East, are correlated with autocracy, others are not. Religious grievances, demands and legitimacy, which are both on average considerably higher in the Middle East than elsewhere, are not correlated with regime type. Also, the strength of those correlations which are significant is relatively low. Thus, these correlations are not strong enough to provide a full explanation for the dramatic difference in the importance of religion between the Middle East and the rest of the world.

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level of analysis see: Small and Singer (1976), Morgan (1993), Chan (1993) Maoz and Russett (1993) Ray (1995), Russett (1993) and Maoz (1998).

29 It is important to note that some argue that the Middle East is becoming more demoocratic. Faqir (1997) analyzes this process in the Arab world where women's liberalization and resistance to Islamic revival are two influential factors. Similarly, Abukhalil (1997) argues that although Arab political parties do not fit the Western model of democracy, their increasing role in society could led to the democratization of the Arab world.

Another possible explanation for the unique impact of religion on Middle Eastern ethnoreligious conflicts is Islam. Lewis (1993b: 136-137, 154) argues that Islam is unique in that in Islam, religion is the ultimate basis for identity and loyalty as opposed to the rest of the world, especially the West, where the basis for identity and loyalty is also national. Given that all of the ethnic conflicts in the Middle East involve at least one Islamic group, it is logical to argue that the explanation for the particular importance of religion in Middle Eastern ethnic conflicts is not due to anything unique about the region but, rather, due to Islam.[30]

However, as discussed above, the level of importance of religion in the Middle East is higher than it is for conflicts involving Muslims outside the Middle East. Thus, even though outside of the Middle East religion is more important in conflicts involving Muslims than it is in conflicts that do not involve Muslims, the "Islamic" variable cannot fully explain the differences between the Middle East and the rest of the world. That is, while Islam appears to add to the importance of religion in a conflict, the fact that a conflict takes place in the Middle East appears to add even more to the importance of religion in a conflict. Thus, Islam alone cannot explain the unique importance of religion in Middle Eastern ethnic conflicts.

Conclusions

This analysis shows that religion is a more important factor in Middle Eastern ethnic conflicts than it is in similar conflicts in the rest of the world. This is particularly interesting given that Middle Eastern ethnic conflicts are similar to ethnic conflicts elsewhere on nonreligious measures of the intensity of these conflicts. Middle Eastern factors like the disproportionate level of autocracy in the Middle East and the regions' Islamic nature provide partial explanations for the unique role of religion in the Middle East. However, these factors cannot fully explain why religion is so important in Middle Eastern ethnic conflicts.

One possible explanation for this phenomenon is that while the analysis takes Islam and authoritarianism/democracy into account, it does so on a case-by-case basis. While this is the methodologically appropriate means to control for such factors, perhaps something was missed. That is, the Middle East is unique both in its concentration of authoritarian governments and the proportion of Muslims in its population. Perhaps the concentration of these two factors in the Middle East causes them to have an influence beyond what can be measured on a case-by-case basis. That is, the concentration of autocratic and Islamic states in the Middle East may have created a unique regional dynamic above and beyond the influence that these factors would have on a state-by-state basis. If this is the case, it would both provide an explanation for the unique role of religion in Middle Eastern ethnic conflicts but, at the same time, it would also uphold the notion that the Middle East is a region distinct from other regions. The concentration of Islam and authoritarianism would merely be either a cause or a manifestation of the region's

30 However, it is important to note that many including Esposito (1995), Fuller and Lesser (1996), and Monshipouri (1998) feel clashes involving Islam and the West are mostly secular in nature.

uniqueness.

Another possible explanation is the rich and unique culture and history of the Middle East. Factors like history and culture are what many quantitative researchers call "soft" variables. This means that they are difficult, if not impossible, to rigorously define and measure. For this reason, Middle Eastern culture and history, which in all probability holds at least part of the answer to the question of religion's disproportional importance in the region, could not be included in this study.

While the above explanations are educated speculation, it is clear from the results that religion has an unambiguous and greatly disproportionate influence on Middle Eastern ethnic conflicts, even when controlling for other factors. The lack of this study's ability to fully explain why this is so is an example of the limits of quantitative studies of complicated phenomena such as religion. However, this study was successful in documenting the role of religion in Middle Eastern ethnic conflict and providing a partial, but not complete, explanation for it. If nothing else, this provides a firmer foundation for future studies, both quantitative and qualitative, exploring the extent of and explanations for the unique role of religion in Middle Eastern politics.

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